

Maurice Hinchey NEWS

26TH CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT, NEW YORK

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
July 31, 2001

Contact: Kevin O'Connell
202-225-6335

HINCHEY OPTIMISTIC ABOUT IMPROVED CARE FOR AREA VETERANS

WASHINGTON - U.S. Representative Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) today welcomed comments made by the Chairman of the House Committee on Veterans Affairs that indicated a willingness to adjust the way funding for VA healthcare facilities is allocated. U.S. Representative Chris Smith (R-NJ) made his remarks during discussion of a Hinchey-sponsored amendment aimed at providing additional funding to hospitals and clinics in the Northeast.

"I was gratified to hear Chairman Smith say that he is preparing a plan that would allocate funding more fairly," said Hinchey. "I'm happy to give him a chance to make good on this promise and I'm looking forward to reading his proposal."

In each of the last three Congresses, Hinchey and U.S. Representative Rodney Frelinghuysen (R-NJ) have jointly offered an amendment to the VA-HUD Appropriations bill to prevent the Veterans Administration from using the Veterans Equitable Resource Allocation (VERA) formula to allocate veterans medical dollars across the country. The two have also authored legislation that would repeal VERA and direct the VA to devise an allocation system that takes into consideration regional differences in health care costs.

Because it does not account for these differences VERA effectively penalizes veterans in the Northeast, particularly the in the Hudson Valley region. Since 1995, the VA's Hudson Valley Health Care system has cut the number of employees by 34 percent and the number of beds by 52 percent. Meanwhile the number of patients has increased by 76 percent and the number of visits has risen by 84 percent.

During debate on the Frelinghuysen-Hinchey amendment on Monday night, Smith, who is in his first year as chairman, stated that he is working on a comprehensive bill to improve the VA healthcare system and assured the amendment's proponents that his bill would address their concerns. In light of Smith's remarks, Hinchey and Frelinghuysen withdrew their amendment.